

How Comprehensible, Interesting and Relevant is Current Research in Traditional Chinese Medicine for Practitioners?

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Background

In traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) as in other fields of complementary medicine, research does not necessarily follow the sequence from in vitro studies via phase I to phase IV clinical trials. Instead, all steps are being investigated simultaneously.

Objectives

According to a recent survey [1], TCM practitioners in Switzerland are generally interested in research results. In the study presented here, our aim was to investigate which kinds of research articles were interesting and relevant for them.

Methods

Thirty abstracts from articles on TCM published on PubMed between April and June 2012 were randomly chosen, including 5 abstracts each of in vitro studies, animal studies, case reports or series, studies with healthy volunteers, trials with patients, or reviews and meta-analyses.

Six TCM practitioners (2 female/4 male, 5 non-medical/1 medical, average age 46 years, average practical TCM experience 9 years) rated 10 abstracts each on a 5 point Likert scale (1=very poor to 5=very good) regarding comprehensibility, interest, relevance to practice, information for patients, and promoting reputation of TCM. The latter 3 items were derived from the results of a survey among members of the Swiss Professional Organization for TCM in 2011 [1]. Each abstract was rated by 2 practitioners. Average ratings for each group of abstracts were calculated.

Results

- Comprehensibility of the abstracts was generally rated as good (Fig. 1).
- Case reports or series, studies with healthy volunteers and trials with patients were rated as of interest by the practitioners (average rating = 3.7, 3.8 and 3.7, respectively).
- Relevance to practice was mediocre for all types (2.5 to 3.5).
- In vitro studies and reviews and meta-analyses were rated as not useful information for patients (2.0).
- Abstracts of reviews and meta-analyses were appraised as negative for the reputation of TCM (2.2). In comments it was criticised that information was not sufficiently detailed or a very broad topic was covered.

Conclusions

Practitioners of TCM find abstracts of study results generally comprehensible and interesting. Case reports or series were rated in a similar way as trials with patients. Although TCM is commonly taught by means of case reports, practitioners seemed to value clinical trials. Abstracts of reviews and meta-analyses were rated to be rather uninformative, which was possibly due to several ones having inconclusive results and the lack of detailed information in these abstracts.

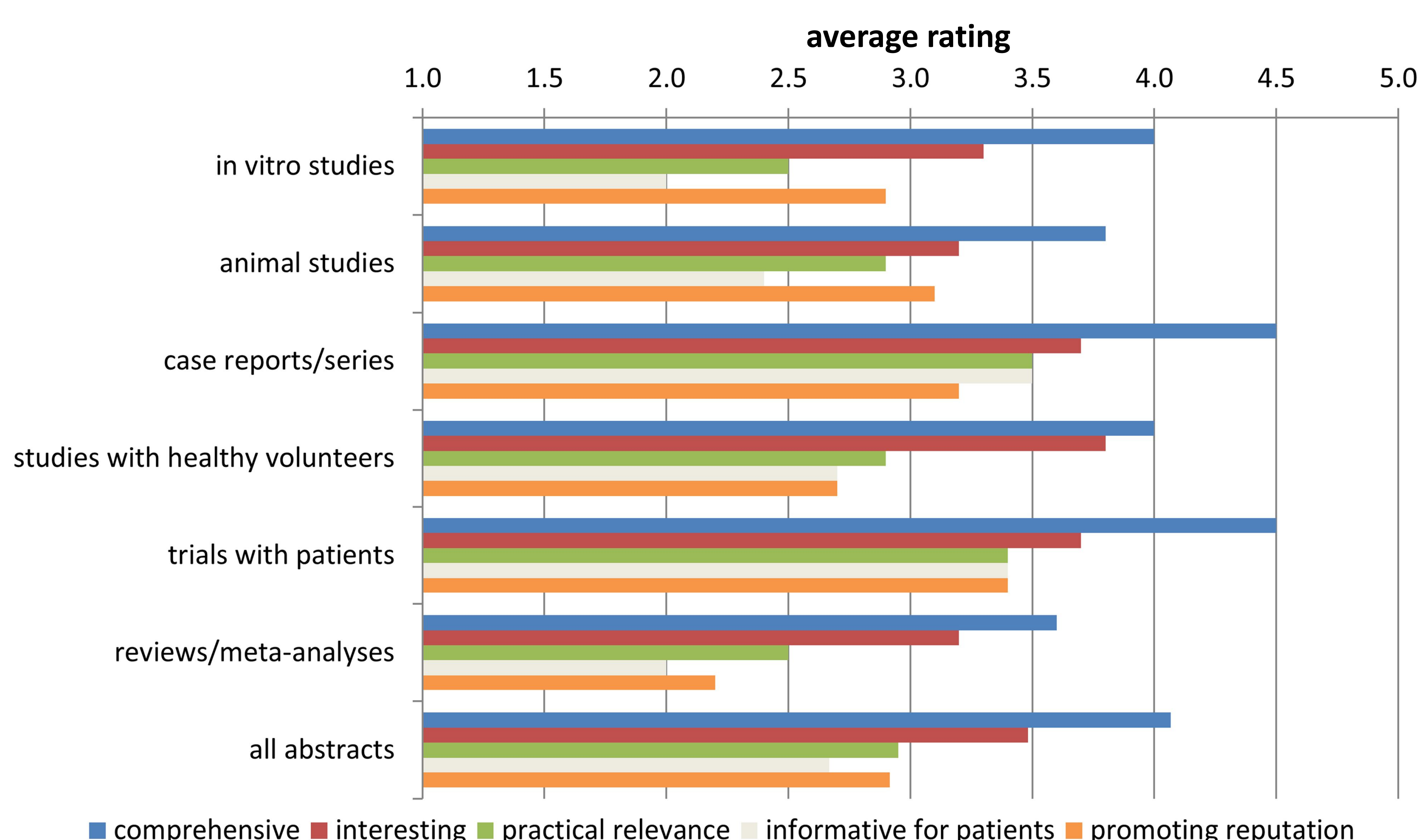


Figure 1. Average rating of 5 abstracts each of in vitro studies, animal studies, case reports or series, studies with healthy volunteers, trials with patients, or reviews and meta-analyses regarding comprehensibility, interest, relevance to practice, information for patients or promoting the reputation of TCM on a 5 point Likert scale (1=very poor to 5=very good).

Abstracts

In vitro studies: Cheng X, et al. J Ethnopharmacol. 2012; Lee S, et al. Evid Based Complement Alternat Med. 2012; Cao G, et al. Analyst. 2012; Tang Y, et al. Fitoterapia. 2012; Coghlan ML, et al. PLoS Genet. 2012

Animal studies: Kwon S, et al. Neurochem Res. 2012; Zhang Y, et al. Br J Anaesth. 2012; Zhu WL, et al. Chin J Integr Med. 2012; Zhang F, et al. Acupunct Med. 2012; Feng Y, et al. Exp Physiol. 2012

Case reports/series: Howell ER. J Can Chiropr Assoc. 2012; Inoue M, et al. Acupunct Med. 2012; Lin W, et al. Acupunct Med. 2012; Omole FS, et al. Acupunct Med. 2012; Highfield ES, et al. J Immigr Minor Health. 2012

Studies with healthy volunteers: Park J, Hopkins JT. Acupunct Med. 2012; Rebhorn C, et al. Pain. 2012; Wang G, et al. Evid Based Complement Alternat Med. 2012; Watanabe M, et al. Evid Based Complement Alternat Med. 2012; Faber PL, et al. Cogn Process. 2012

Trials with patients: Kim TH, et al. PLoS One. 2012; Frisk J, et al. Support Care Cancer. 2012; Kuan SC, et al. Biol Res Nurs. 2012; Liang KL, et al. Evid Based Complement Alternat Med. 2012; Wong W, et al. Fam Pract. 2012

Reviews/meta-analyses: Aیدlsburger P, et al. GMS Health Technol Assess. 2012; Qu F, et al. J Altern Complement Med. 2012; Zhang QH, et al. Int Wound J. 2012; Li FL, et al. Evid Based Complement Alternat Med. 2012; Dong ZY, et al. World J Gastroenterol. 2012

Reference

[1] Klein S, Reis T, Näf A, Dudler B, Gopp R. Results of the member survey of the working group research & development. YinYang 2012;1:7-8.

Acknowledgement

The photographs were taken by Peter Maurer.